

Senator Haskell, Representative Elliott and distinguished members of the committee:

Thank you Representative Welander, for giving some of you time for me to speak today. My name is Maren Westgard and I am a student at Wesleyan University. I am from Orange CT and am a constituent of Representative Mary Welander and Senator James Maroney. Today, I am testifying in favor of **HB 6374**, An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct On College Campuses.

I have lived in CT and gone to school in CT my entire life. I love that I have the chance to receive a quality higher education in the place that I have known and loved my whole life. However, sexual misconduct, abuse, and assault is a persistent problem on college campuses. Even in a school like Wesleyan, which is considered to be a safe and empowering environment, this issue is still prevalent. We have an instagram page, called WesleyanSurvivors, referring to survivors of sexual interpersonal violence, that was created on June 30th 2020. That account has already posted 237 anonymous stories of abuse, of breaches of consent, of power being taken away from individuals when it never should have been. 237 stories shared in just seven months of being online. 237 of my classmates. And those are only the ones who feel comfortable sharing their stories. No school has been immune to the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses. It is happening here in Connecticut.

And that is unacceptable. Higher education is a time to expand our horizons, to make new friends, and to find ourselves and our passions. Students cannot do that when they feel unable to report what has happened to them, and their stories go untold. A campus where survivors must walk around knowing they might have to face the perpetrator of violence when they eat in the dining hall, when they go to study in the library, when they sit down in a classroom, is not a safe place. That is not an environment that allows for learning to happen. We must do everything we can to combat the culture of sexual violence.

A campus climate survey mandate would have better equipped my university with the information and insights to better address sexual violence. Many students do not report their experiences, and so the campus climate survey allows students to tell their story in a safe, confidential platform. I would love for the 237 students and counting from Wesleyan Survivors to be able to report what they have experienced in a confidential way that will allow the university to have a clear picture on the violence that is actually taking place in our school. A campus climate survey and the insights it would acquire would allow universities to better understand the epidemic of sexual violence.

I also want to emphasize the necessity of the frequency of a two year survey. I believe this frequency is essential to encapsulating the needs of *all* students in the State. A two year survey is inclusive to programs less than four years, including graduate and associate degree programs. I know that these bills will improve students and survivors lives all across Connecticut. To the legislators here today, you have the power to improve campus safety for all students, please report this bill favorably out of committee. Please vote this bill out of committee as soon as possible.

-Maren Westgard